December 12, 2000

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-00-021C

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by the Region IV staff on this date.

Facility
Transalta Centralia Mining LLC
Centralia, Washington
License No.: WN-I0241-1
Washington Licensee

Licensee Emergency Classification
___ Notification of Unusual Event
___ Alert
___ Site Area Emergency
___ General Emergency
_X_ Not Applicable

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE MECHANICAL FAILURE OF A RONAN GAUGING DEVICE

DESCRIPTION:
This is the third update on an event that the Washington Department of Health (WDOH) initially reported on September 15, 2000, (see PNO-IV-00-021, PNO-IV-00-021A and PNO-IV-00-021B) regarding a mechanical failure of a fixed gauging device. This update concerns two additional mechanical failures of the same Ronan Engineering Company Model SA-4 gauging device.

As reported previously, the device is specifically licensed for density process measurements and uses a cesium-137 sealed source, Amersham Model CDC.711M not to exceed 74 gigabecquerels (2 curies). The gauge is operated by lowering the source at the end of an approximately six foot source rod into a dry well. The gauge is removed from service by pulling up on the source rod until the source enters the shielded body of the gauge. The source rod was originally constructed in several screw-together sections. The first separation failure, reported in PNO-IV-00-021 and PNO-IV-00-021A, was the apparent result of mechanical vibration loosening the upper screw joint of the rod. The second separation failure, reported in PNO-IV-00-021B, was presumed to be due to metal fatigue. The male threaded portion of the lower screw joint snapped off from the rod as it was being lifted. Since the original design was no longer available from Ronan, the actual replacement rod consisted of two rod sections connected at each joint by a spring-loaded brass pin and a short manufactured adapter that was tooled for the pin connector at one end and a threaded male connector at the other.

The licensee notified WDOH that the replacement rod discussed above had failed while lifting the source rod on November 21 and 23, 2000. In both instances, the lower pin-connected joint failed as the source entered the shield apparently due to the increased tension on the spring-loaded brass pin. After the second failure, the licensee took the gauge out of service and requested the manufacturer to provide the original screw-together designed source rod. A replacement was installed on December 7, 2000. The licensee had not replaced the original screw-together source rods with the pin-connected version in the other three gauges at the facility. The licensee plans to replace all four gauges with new process equipment by the end of 2001.

Region IV received notification of this occurrence by email from WDOH at 6:15 p.m. on December 11, 2000. Region IV has informed OEDO, NMSS, and OSTP.

This information has been discussed with the State and is current as of 11:00 a.m. on December 12, 2000.

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